Sheet 2.

file under Mrs. Anna Johnston

P I O N E E R W O M A N

She lives in a spotless two-roomed cottage on the very outskirts of our town. She rises at six, feeds her chickens, chops her wood, sets bread to rise, gets two grandchildren off to school -- and then begins her day's work. She is seventy-three years old. Her spirit is the essence of the early pioneers of the Peace River Country.

Anna Johnston left Lacombe in January, 1910. She had come there years before because her parents possessed the courage to endure the innumerable hardships that accompanied a love for fresh, untrespassed country. And she left there because she had inherited that courage and that love.

She and her family were eight of the sixteen people who, in the bitterest winter weather, ventured on a journey over a trail that was hardly more than a bridle path. to Grande Prairie They brought enough supplies for a year - chiefly rolled oats, dried beans, dried rhubarb, and prunes - and a good part of that was eaten on the journey. The ten gallon jar of jam made before leaving was licked clean; a three-year-old calf was summarily disposed of. Mrs. Johnston and her eldest daughter were appointed cooks - not an easy task, cooking for sixteen people, most of whom were men with hearty appetites. They baked six loaves of bread a day, as well as two or three pans of biscuits.

The first day on the trail the stove jiggled

perilously; finally it gave an aggrieved flounce, and the roast of beef tumbled to the floor. Mrs. Johnston, mindful of the dogs, hastily slammed the caboose door shut. Then she proceeded to trim the parts which were dirty. But apparently she left one little piece untrimmed, for at dinner that night her eldest son looked up from his plate and said quietly, "Mother, you forgot to turn out the cowbarn this morning."

For the rest of the journey all the kettles were wired to the stove.

The Grande Prairie that now boasts a radio station and one of the most important air bases in Canada, at that time consisted of exactly one building - the Bear Creek Stoppinghouse. But it was a glorious sight to those caboose-weary pioneers when they finally reached it on March 14, 1910.

The log building which for five months was "home", had been built for them before their arrival by a friend of Mr. Johnston. Until May, when the men "went locating" and built a more substantial house, its one room was by night a bedding down place for sixteen people.

The house (which Anna Johnston was to live in for twenty-five years) was finished by the end of the summer. It was of log, and it had a sitting-room, a kitchen, three big bedrooms, and lots of windows. Besides what they had brought with them - a cook stove, a piano, a heating stove, six chairs, a sewing machine, the family chime clock, and the milk separator - there were beds, real home-made beds with ticks of straw and muslin.

The only drawback was the sod roof which they had for four years. Every time it poured outside it poured inside, and during the day the children put on raincoats and rubbers and swept the rain out the door. The ridgepole offered the only protection and under it was placed the most prized possession - the piano. On rainy nights everyone slept under the table.

The district's first Dominion Day Celebration was held that year, and every white person within a radius of sixty miles attended. They came to the north side of Lake Saskatoon by wagon, by stoneboat (a crude affair consisting of two logs fastened together, with bedding laid across), or on foot - and they stayed two days. Most of them wore the clothes they had worn into the country - the women were bareheaded and clad in Mother Hubbards; but not so Anna Johnston's teen-age daughters. Their mother had made them hats - hats which would rival those of any city belle of that day. Nina, the nineteen-year-old, wore a hat with a rim of tea-matting, a big, many-pleated ruffle, and narrow silk bowstrings; but sixteen-year-old Rena's was the height of ingenuity. The frame was of wire and covered with huckabeck towelling; the "show part" was unbleached linen, trimmed with a large red ribbon and apple blossoms.

But apart from these necessary femininities, here was to be found true democracy. Life was reduced to its lowest common denominator; superficialities were discarded;

no man was better than his neighbor.

Inevitably this neighbor's name was either Campbell, Johnston, or Smith. However, the nicknames given them by their fellows were picturesque and explicit: Anna Johnston's husband was known as Lacombe Johnston; the Johnston of the Beaverlodge district answered to Rutabaga, because he raised rutabaga turnips; another Johnston, who left for the North with a too-weak sled and arrived with it bound many times with wire, bore the name of Haywire until he died; Prettyfave Johnston possessed the prettiest wife in the Peace River Country.

Next to the Dominion Day Celebration, Anna Johnston's chief recollections of that first year are connected with her husband's trip to Edmonton. Christmas was celebrated on December 16, and the men left for "the outside" on December 17, leaving Mrs. Johnston, Nina, Rena, and eight-year-old George. Their closest neighbor was ten miles east; to the south of them there was nothing. They saw no one but themselves until one day in February, when a speck of black on the white horizon gradually took the form of a man on snowshoes. He was a gruff, rather cynical old trapper, and he had made the journey "just to see how you was gettin' along, with the men away, and all". Anna Johnston assured him that everything was fine, and that the men were expected at any time.

In reality, it was the middle of March, and the food was nearly gone, when the men returned. The long, tedious trip

had left its mark on them. They had very heavy colds, and - what to the women seemed much worse - were crawling with lice, picked up from the various stoppinghouses on the four hundred and eighty five mile journey. Boiling and reboiling the clothes was a three-day job. Mrs. Johnston swore that if she had been along it would not have been necessary.

Not many months passed before she had a chance to prove it. In the harvest field - and a meagre harvest it was - Mr. Johnston's team ran away, and he broke his leg in six places. The only doctor in the country, a Miss Higby, had literally no equipment. Yet she managed to set the leg temporarily; and the Johnstons made plans to go to Edmonton after the first freeze-up. With them went a sickly young neighbor girl called Pearl who was going to her people in Red Deer, and little George.

They went by caboose to Edson, and then took a train to Edmonton. The first night on the trail, Mrs. Johnston tried to sleep; but once, when she got up to tend to the fire, she happened to touch the inert Pearl. The girl's hand was clammy, almost - almost lifeless. Its coldness sent chills through Mrs. Johnston. When she had once assured herself that the girl was not dead, she quickly heated a jam-pail of water and put it to the feet of the sleeping girl. She did the same for young George, who was prone to heart attacks; and she continued this for fourteen days. The few minutes rest she had snatched

that first night lasted her the remaining thirteen.

Even a little fire was a dangerous thing - and in forty below weather, more than a little fire was necessary. Mrs. Johnston gave strict instructions that the fire was to be left to her. She saw Pearl wink at Mr. Johnston. Half an hour later the wood floor underneath the stove was ablaze. Mrs. Johnston stamped out the flames, unscrewed the little stove, and set it outside until it cooled off. Reproaches and "I told-you-sos" were foreign to her, and evidently they were not necessary, for Pearl never again put wood in the little stove.

Looking after Pearl was the first of a great number of experiences in which Mrs. Johnston played Florence Nightingale. She brought most pioneer babies into the world. During the 'flu epidemic in 1918, her home always had at least five patients in it. She massaged fifteen people a week, and in the six weeks when the epidemic was at its height she averaged eight hours of sleep a week. It was then that she lost her husband and one son.

She had little time to mourn for them; her immediate job was to save other mothers and wives the tragedy of losing their men. She succeeded as well as anyone could have, in the grim task of caring for those struck by the deadly germ. She accounts this success to two things: massage and faith.

Massage is to Mrs. Johnston what penicillin is becoming to present-day doctors, and for her purposes just as effective. Faith - well, that's something not easily explained. Perhaps

it is because she early recognized the fact that, strong as her own personality and character were, she needed Someone stronger before she could be complete.

The case of Hilda Clifford is an outstanding example of this. Hilda's schoolteacher mother was the first white woman to set foot in the Peace River Country; Hilda herself was the first white baby born there. One February day in 1924 Anna Johnston got a phone call from Grande Prairie. It was Mrs. Clifford, and she said that Hidla had become a victim of paralysis.

"I could have taken her to the hospital, but Dr. O'Brien says that she would get better care under you."

Mrs. Johnston, complete with quilts and a chair, left the farm that morning. When she arrived in Grande Prairie she lost no time in bundling the girl into a chair, into the waiting cutter, and finally onto the train to Dimsdale. For four months Hilda Clifford lay in her cot on the farm, not moving. Mrs. Johnston massaged her three times a day.

Until the first day of May she scarcely left the sick girl's bedside - not even to sleep. The fact that she can go for months at a time without lying down is not remarkable to Mrs. Johnston. This is one of the places where faith comes in - "The Bible says that our strength shall be as our day," she states calmly, "and I believe that".

In May, the land demanded her attention. Every morning she would set Hilda in a chair in the buggy, and then hitch a horse to the buggy. A neighbor woman offered one dollar to watch diminutive Mrs. Johnston lift a good-sized

girl and a chair up into the cart.

As she sat in the bright sunlight and watched Mrs. Johnston working, life seemed to creep back into the sick girl's cheeks. By the first of June she was able to walk again.

"Things like that is what tries a person," Mrs. Johnston reflects today. "My whole life I have been busy, busy, busy; yet I don't suppose I would have changed a minute of it, even if I could.

"I've never gone hungry, and I've never been cold. I've never been afraid, and I don't know what lonesomeness is."

Today, this simple, direct woman patches, launders, sews, and makes rugs for people. Her money goes for Sunday School collection, church collection, church broadcasts, and missionary work. The most dreadful experience of her life occurred two years ago, when she was ill in the hospital and had nothing to do.

"I suppose if I had nothing to do for myself I'd do it for someone else," she muses.

Mrs. Johnston, that is the key to the success your life has been, and is, and will be. Not successful materially perhaps, but successful mentally and physically and spiritually. Because you have spent your life working for others - not grudgingly, or as a martyr - but simply by accepting as God's

Will whatever come your way.

Shakespeare said, "Some people are born great; some are made great; others have greatness thrust upon the." Mrs. Johnston, you are great three times over.